

THE ANDAMAN ISLANDERS

776 rule the multiplication and growth of the various animals and plants useful to Man.

[784] The Onges do not love Eiuga, or any of the other spirits. They merely fear them, and seek to evade their anger by various expedients. It is curious that they never hesitate to try and deceive the spirits and think themselves very clever when they manage to steal roots or tubers from the ground. Nor do they revere the spirits of their ancestors; these are to be feared and propitiated by preservation of their bones. By definition none of the spirits, since they can be deceived by simple tricks, can be all-powerful, but this conclusion, simple though it is, is still beyond the Onges' powers of reasoning.

769 The Onges' fear of the dead is instanced by their carrying round
[765] their necks the *ibidangbe*, or necklet of human jaws, as a propitiation. The wearing of the bones prevents the spirit from going away (by analogy the bones of dead enemies are burned to force the spirit, clearly a hostile one, to leave the place). The custom of burial within the communal hut follows the same logic - the spirits of the dead are kept near their bones and hence near their relatives, to help them in the daily round of hunting, fishing and gathering food.¹

769 Unlike most of the other peoples whose burial customs are even
778 today based on their underlying principles, the Onges have not
776 progressed beyond the stage of relating the dead directly to the
782 demands of daily life; they have no 'practices' of any kind, no concept at all of holy places, prayers or images. Even the very names
784 of the dead are soon forgotten. Their fears, however, are none the less very real. They do not like to speak of Eiuga or even of the lesser spirits, for fear of attracting their attention.

773 The Onges have no stories or explanatory legends, like those
538 reported by Brown for Great Andaman. They have only short
533 epics, if such they may be called, recalling extraordinary events in

[171] ¹ This belief is of very remote origin, and can be traced back at least to the megaliths of southern Asia, like the splendid ones which I was able to photograph, among others, in the mountains of Travancore. Here again the object was to prevent the dead from leaving their relatives. Similar ideas are found today in India among several tribes, notably the Munda, or Nias, and among various peoples of Indonesia, and even Oceania. The rituals are probably followed today without any understanding of their meaning or symbolism; the details vary from place to place, but the underlying principle, the original fear, remains the same everywhere.